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TECHNICAL FIELD OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates in general to the field of protective equipment and more particularly to an apparatus and method for protecting and wiping a surface, such as the gripped surface of a golf club, tennis racquet, or tool handle.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The game of golf, not unlike other sports and activities, requires precision and consistency to produce accurate and precise shots. Because a golf swing may produce club head speeds in excess of 100 miles per hour, any slight unintended deviation in how the club face impacts the golf ball will result in an inaccurate shot. This unintended deviation may be caused by various reasons including slippage in the golfer's grip with the handle or grip of the golf club.

The golfer's grip is essential to produce accurate and precise golf shots. The golfer's grip is the connection or link between a golfer and the golf club. The golfer's grip is fundamental in accurately aligning the golf club with the ball at address, and ensuring that no change occurs in the grip between address and when the ball is struck. Any change in the grip between address and when the ball is struck may result in an inaccurate golf shot.

Many golfers use golf gloves to reduce the occurrence of slippage and to provide added confidence through a golf swing. Golf gloves generally are used on one hand of the golfer. Golf gloves, unfortunately, are not effective when the grip of a golf club is wet, slippery or dirty. Golf gloves are also expensive, burdensome to take on and off, and uncomfortable in hot weather.

Slippage in the golfer's grip with the grip of the golf

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club may be caused by a wet or oily grip. A wet or oily grip surface may be caused by rain, dew, perspiration, lotions, sun block, insect repellants, or natural skin oils. These foreign substances, when present on either the hands or the grip of the golf club will create undesired and unintended slippage and inaccurate golf shots. Towels are ineffective when exposed to the rain or other moisture, after being used to clean club faces, or when contaminated by other means. Towels are also difficult to keep dry during rainy conditions. Towels have limited absorption properties as compared to other materials.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

From the foregoing it may be appreciated that a need has arisen for an apparatus and method for protecting a surface, such as the grip of a golf club. In accordance with the present invention, an apparatus and method for protecting a surface are provided that substantially eliminate one or more of the disadvantages and problems outlined above.

According to one aspect of the present invention, an apparatus for use with a surface of an implement is provided that includes an outer cover and an absorbent member. The outer cover includes a top and a bottom portion, an interior surface, an opening formed at the bottom portion of the outer cover, an internal volume defined as the volume bordered by the interior surface of the outer cover and the opening of the outer cover, and an exterior surface. The absorbent member is positioned within the internal volume of the outer cover and is operable to receive the surface through the opening of the outer cover.

The present invention provides a profusion of

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technical advantages that include the capability to protect, wipe and clean a surface, such as the surface of an implement, which may be the grip of a golf club.

The present invention also provides the significant technical advantage of providing an apparatus that remains dry during rain and that is very absorbent so that the surface of an implement or article may be dried during rain. For example, a golf towel will get wet in the rain and becomes useless to dry the grip of a golf club during the rain.

The present invention provides the significant technical advantage of being fastened or positioned in such a manner that the outer cover may serve as an advertising space such that a logo or advertisement may be positioned on or adjacent the exterior surface of the outer cover.

The present invention provides the additional technical advantage of being easily disassembled such that it can be easily cleaned, disinfected, if needed, and may be mildew resistant. In other embodiments, the present invention may be implemented with a flexible material that is portable, light weight, and easy to handle.

Other technical advantages are readily apparent to one skilled in the art from the following figures, description, and claims.

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BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

For a more complete understanding of the present invention and the advantages thereof, reference is now made to the following brief description, taken in connection with the accompanying drawings and detailed description, wherein like reference numerals represent like parts, in which:

FIGURES 1-3 are perspective views that illustrate an apparatus for protecting and wiping a surface, such as the grip of a golf club, and the use of the apparatus with the grip of a golf club;

FIGURES 4-7 are perspective views that illustrate an apparatus for protecting and wiping a golf club, and a method of making or forming an outer member of the apparatus;

FIGURES 8-10 are perspective views that illustrate the use of a folded sheet of absorbent material to serve as an absorbent member of the apparatus for protecting and wiping a golf club;

FIGURES 11-13 are side, top, and opening views of the apparatus that illustrate a strap or hook connected to the apparatus in several positions;

FIGURES 14-16 are side and top views of the apparatus that illustrate various hook/strap attachments affixed to the outer cover;

FIGURES 17-19 illustrate various nylon bags that may serve as the outer cover according to an embodiment of the present invention;

FIGURES 20-22 illustrate various absorbent members that are provided, in one embodiment, in a cylinder configuration and in a folded configuration;

FIGURES 23-25 illustrate various absorbent members configured in various shapes such as a cylinder/closed

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end/folded absorbent member, along with an outer cover they within according to an embodiment of the present invention;

FIGURES 26-28 illustrate an absorbent member shown being inserted into internal volume of the outer cover;

FIGURES 29-31 illustrates various exemplary shapes of an outer cover that may be used in the present invention;

FIGURES 32-34 illustrates an embodiment of the outer cover that includes a metal cap, and, in FIGURE 32, another embodiment that includes a dual chamber outer cover;

FIGURES 35-37 illustrates various embodiments and features that may be included as part of the present invention such as an outer cover with an open end top, ventilation holes, and a closed end top with a cap that affixes to the outer cover;

FIGURES 38-40 illustrates a member, such as an obstructive lip positioned at, near or adjacent the opening of the outer cover such that the absorbent member will be retained within the internal volume of the outer cover, as well as a hook fastener, such as VELCRO, to secure the absorbent member to the internal volume of the outer cover;

FIGURES 41-44 illustrates a retaining lip or collar of the outer cover holding an absorbent member, such as an absorbent member that has been folded, within the outer cover, and an alternative embodiment using a fastener, such as a button snap to hold the absorbent member within the outer cover; and

FIGURES 45-47 illustrates an absorbent material, such as silica or some other absorbent material or substance to keep the absorbent member dry, along with an apparatus that may be used to protect and/or wipe a ball, such as a football.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

It should be understood at the outset that although an

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exemplary implementation of the present invention is illustrated below, the present invention may be implemented using any number of techniques, whether currently known or in existence. The present invention should in no way be limited to the exemplary implementations, drawings, and techniques illustrated below, including the exemplary design and implementation illustrated and described herein.

FIGURES 1-3 are perspective views that illustrate an apparatus for protecting and wiping a surface, such as the grip of a golf club, and the use of the apparatus with the grip of a golf club;

FIGURE 1 is a view of an apparatus 10, such as an apparatus for protecting and wiping a surface, according to one embodiment of the present invention. The apparatus 10, which will be illustrated more fully in succeeding FIGURES, may be used to protect or wipe any of a variety of surfaces. In a preferred embodiment, the apparatus 10 is used to protect or wipe the surface of the grip or handle of a golf club, as is illustrated in FIGURE 1.

The grip of the golf club is shown within the apparatus 10 such that the surface, which is a three-dimensional surface, is protected within an internal volume of the apparatus 10. In a preferred embodiment, an absorbent member is provided within the internal volume of an outer cover such that any fluid or moisture on the surface of the grip of the golf club may come in contact with the absorbent member to wipe or remove such fluid or moisture.

FIGURE 2 is a view of the apparatus 10 showing the grip of the golf club in position to enter within an internal volume of the apparatus 10. This will allow the golf grip to be protected and/or wiped or cleaned by the apparatus 10. The apparatus 10 is shown with an outer

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cover 12 and an absorbent member 14. The outer cover 12 may be provided in any of a variety of materials, such as a foam, cloth, coating, or virtually any material that may be formed or draped to include an internal volume. The absorbent member 14 may be provided using any of a variety of materials, such as a cellulose sponge, an artificial sponge, an open cell foam, a terry cloth, a cotton fabric, a nylon reinforced sponge, or any other available absorbent material.

FIGURE 3 is a view, similar to FIGURE 2, in which the grip or handle of the golf club is shown inserted within the internal volume of the outer cover 12 of the apparatus 10. The grip of the golf club is also shown in contact with the absorbent member 14 so that the grip is protected and/or any fluid or moisture on the grip may be absorbed or removed by the absorbent member 14.

It should be understood, however, that the apparatus 10 of the present invention may be provided and any of a variety of shapes and/or configurations and may be used to protect and/or wipe virtually any available surface, such as the surface of an implement, including tool handles, fishing pole handles, tennis racket handles, and virtually any other three-dimensional surface or article, including the surface of a football in another embodiment. Of course, the apparatus 10 may need to be formed in various shapes and/or configurations to accommodate the particular surface or surface implement to be protected and/or wiped.

The shape of certain surfaces, however, are similar enough such that an apparatus 10, such as the apparatus 10 shown in FIGURE 3, may be used on different implements. For example, the apparatus 10 of FIGURE 3 may be designed to accommodate both the grip of a racket and the grip of a golf club because of their similar shapes.

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FIGURES 4-7 are perspective views that illustrate an apparatus for protecting and wiping a golf club, and a method of making or forming an outer member of the apparatus.

FIGURE 4 is a view of the apparatus 10 that illustrates a surface, such as the grip of a golf club, being removed from the internal volume of the outer cover 12 of the apparatus 10 such that the surface of the grip of a golf club comes in contact with the absorbent member 14.

As was discussed above, this allows the surface of the grip of the golf club to be wiped to remove any undesired moisture or fluid on such surface. This provides the significant advantage of allowing a golfer, for example, to play without the need of a golf glove and/or to ensure that a sound or reliable grip will be maintained through the golf swing. This may greatly improve a golfer's score.

FIGURE 5 is a view of the outer cover 12, according to one embodiment of the present invention. As was mentioned above, it should be understood that the outer cover 12 may be formed using any of a variety of materials or coatings.

The embodiment of the outer cover 12 of **FIGURE 5** is shown as a one piece polyethylene foam with a cloth covering. The side of the outer cover 12 with the cloth covering is visible in **FIGURE 5**.

Of course, in other embodiments, the outer cover 12 may be provided as multiple pieces. For example, a first portion 16 and a second portion 18 may be provided as separate pieces to form the outer cover 12. It should be understood that the outer cover 12 may be provided virtually in any configuration, with or without the rounded portions as shown in the embodiment of **FIGURE 5**. The outer cover 12 is also shown with a hole 20 in the first portion 16 and a hole 22 in the second portion 18. The hole 20 and

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the hole 22 are aligned when the outer cover 12 is folded along a common boundary. This makes a common hole that may be used with a strap and/or hook to hang the apparatus. The apparatus may be referred to as a GRIPL.

FIGURE 6 is a view of the outer cover 12 similar to the view of FIGURE 5 that illustrates the opposite side of the outer cover 12. In the embodiment illustrated, the exposed side of the outer cover 12 does not have a cloth laminate or covering as was illustrated in FIGURE 5. In a preferred embodiment, an edge 24 and an edge 26 are provided such that when the outer cover 12 is folded, these edges are matched with one another such that the edges may be adhere to one another through any available adhesion mechanism. This may include sewing, gluing, sonic sealing, interlocking, such as through a zipper, vulcanizing, or any known or available method or technique for joining or adhering to surfaces or edges.

In another embodiment of the present invention, the outer cover 12 (which may also be referred to as a layer or shell) is provided using a clear or semi-transparent, flexible material. This allows an insert, such as an advertising insert, to be positioned between the outer cover, layer, or shell and the inner core or inner portion of the outer cover. This provides the substantial advantage of allowing custom advertising inserts to be created, from virtually any material, including commonly available printing substrates, and used with the same outer covering and inner core.

The absorbent member 14, as can be partially viewed in FIGURE 4, may include any of a variety of substances such as an antimicrobial substance, which may include 3M's STAYFRESH technology used in its sponge, such as MICROBAND technology which uses tryclosan or similar substances, that

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inhibit the growth of cellular growth such as funguses, molds, bacteria, etc. In other embodiments a tacky substance may be provided in or around the absorbent member 14 to provide tackiness to the surface of an implement, such as the grip of a golf club. In other embodiments, the outer cover 12 may included openings or holes, such as ventilation holes, so that substances may be squirted or injected to the internal volume of the outer cover where the absorbent member will be positioned.

FIGURE 7 illustrates an outer cover with an opening at its bottom and a rounded top that is closed. This may be formed of virtually any material, but preferably a cloth covered foam, such as a closed-cell foam. The cloth will preferably provided a surface for advertising, such as for silk screening a logo, imprinting a design, or embossing some identifier.

FIGURES 8 - 47, are discussed more fully below, illustrate various views, embodiments and aspects that may be provided by the present invention. Some of these embodiments, as are illustrated, provide aesthetic features and/or functional features. For example, FIGURES 9, 10, 20, 21, 22, 23, 26, 33, and 36 illustrate various absorbent member variations, while FIGURES 17, 19, 20, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42 and 43 illustrate various outer cover variations. An illustration of a ledge, obstruction, or retaining member is illustrated in FIGURES 36, 37, and 39 through 44. FIGURE 34 illustrates an enclosure of tubular member to serve as the outer cover 12, and the formation of a closed end though various mechanisms such as through a cap, plug, or by "pinching" the end of the outer cover 12 to form a closed end, which also may include an opening to hang the apparatus 10. FIGURE 32 illustrates a "double" chambered

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outer cover that can hold two absorbent members, while FIGURE 37 illustrates an outer cover that is a "skin" or thin membrane.

FIGURES 8-10 are perspective views that illustrate the use of a folded sheet of absorbent material to serve as an absorbent member 14 of the apparatus 10 of FIGURE 8 for protecting and wiping a golf club.

FIGURES 11-13 are side, top, and opening views of the apparatus 10 that illustrate a strap and hook 50 connected to the apparatus 10 in several positions.

FIGURES 14-16 are side and top views of the apparatus 10 that illustrate various hook/strap attachments 50 affixed to the outer cover of the apparatus 10.

FIGURES 17-19 illustrate various flexible, nylon bags 60 that may serve as the outer cover according to an embodiment of the present invention. A loop or hook 62 is shown positioned at the top, closed end of the nylon bags 60 while the bottom of the nylon bags 60 are open to provide an opening to receive an absorbent member within the nylon bag. An elastic portion 64 surrounds the opening, which may help prevent the absorbent member from exiting the apparatus.

FIGURES 20-22 illustrate various absorbent members 14 that are provided, in one embodiment, in a cylinder configuration of FIGURES 20 and 21 and in a folded configuration of FIGURE 22.

FIGURES 23-25 illustrate various absorbent members 14 configured in various shapes such as a cylinder/closed end/folded absorbent members of FIGURE 23, along with an outer cover 12 of FIGURES 24-25, that they may reside within the internal volume of the outer cover 12.

FIGURES 26-28 illustrate an absorbent member 14 shown being inserted into the opening and internal volume of an

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outer cover 12 to form an apparatus 10 according to an embodiment of the present invention.

FIGURES 29-31 illustrates various exemplary shapes of an outer cover 12 that may be used in the present invention. These may provide both aesthetic features and functional features, such as a hand grip or hole to hang the apparatus. Preferably, the outer cover 12 will be soft to allow a user to insert an implement, such as the grip of a golf club, and to squeeze the outer cover 12 to provide closer contact between the absorbent member and the surface being wiped or protected. Although it should be understood that the present invention may include a hard outer cover 12. Note, the term implement as used herein may include, in addition to the definition of implement that includes a tool or instrument used in doing work, virtually any article that has a surface. For example, the grip of a golf club, a football, the handle of a fishing pole, etc.

FIGURES 32-34 illustrates an embodiment of the outer cover 12 that includes a metal cap 70 at a closed end of the outer cover 12, and, in FIGURE 32, another embodiment that includes a dual chamber outer cover 12 such that two implements may be wiped.

FIGURES 35-37 illustrates various embodiments and features that may be included as part of the present invention such as an outer cover 12 with an open end top 90, ventilation holes 92, a closed end top 94, and a cap 96 that affixes to the outer cover 12. An absorbent member 10 is also illustrated. The outer cover 12 may be made of plastic, a polymer or virtually any material, and may be made of injection molding, or through impression molding.

FIGURES 38-40 illustrates a member 100, such as an obstructive lip 100 positioned at, near or adjacent the

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opening of the outer cover 12 such that the absorbent member 14 will be retained within the internal volume of the outer cover 12, as well as a hook fastener 110, such as VELCRO, to secure the absorbent member 14 to the internal volume of the outer cover 12.

FIGURES 41-44 illustrates a retaining lip or collar 200 of the outer cover 12 holding an absorbent member, such as an absorbent member 10 that has been folded, within the outer cover 12, and an alternative embodiment using a fastener, such as a button snap 200 to hold the absorbent member 10 within the outer cover 12.

FIGURES 45-47 illustrates an absorbent material 210, such as silica or some other absorbent material or substance to keep the absorbent member 14 dry, along with an apparatus 10 that may be used to protect and/or wipe a ball, such as a football 220.

It should be understood that even though the present invention is explained and illustrated herein in connection with its use and benefits in association with golf grips, the present invention may be utilized with virtually any handle or elongated member such as, for example, tennis rackets, hammers, baseball bats, tools, hand held implements, and the like. The present invention also presents a unique opportunity to create new advertising space never before made available.

Thus, it is apparent that there has been provided, in accordance with the present invention, an apparatus and method for protecting and wiping a surface that satisfies one or more of the advantages set forth above. Although the preferred embodiment has been described in detail, it should be understood that various changes, substitutions, and alterations can be made herein without departing from the scope of the present invention, even if all of the

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advantages identified above are not present. For example, the may be provided in any number of shapes and designs. The present invention may be implemented using any of a variety of materials and configurations.

The various components, members, elements, and methods described and illustrated in the preferred embodiment as discrete or separate may be combined or integrated with other components, members, elements, and methods without departing from the scope of the present invention. The present invention may be used to detect virtually any substance that can be detected. Other examples of changes, substitutions, and alterations are readily ascertainable by one skilled in the art and could be made without departing from the spirit and scope of the present invention.